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Melbourne's Journal of Libertarian Communism

THIS ISSUE ◆

- SPECIAL FEATURE: Melbourne Black Election Coverage
- Contextualising The Declaration Of The Solidarity Delegation *By Seamus*
- Final Statement & Commitments *By Australian Solidarity Delegation in Colombia*
- New Death Threats Against The SINALTRAINAL Executive *By Edgar Paez & Durban Velez [edited statement]*
- LASNET Solidarity Gathering Callout
- A Tale Of Sand, & Those Who Feed From It *By SAKSI*
- CO.HE.RE.VI *By Seamus & Giftzwerg*
- Sex Workers Are Workers Too! *By Benny Rudeboy*
- Transforming A Culture of Sexual Violence *By Rebecca*
- Dear Diego *By James*

EDITORIAL ◆

At various times in the course of this project, we have called for others to participate in bringing out *Melbourne Black*. Much to our distress, some of you have taken the offer seriously. Thus we have been forced to write the following statement of principles and rules for editors. Enjoy, you fuckers. **Our first editors' meeting will be Saturday, October 23, at 2:00 pm in the LASNET office in the Trades Hall basement.**

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Meals rocking it.
Cheers homie!

Thanks:

Lumps, Eat & *Amor Fati*, MAC, LASNET, *Mutiny*, Gabs, Benny, Rebecca, Meals, Carlos, Tristan, you.

Melbourne Black and the struggle for libertarian communism

Libertarian communism is the name for a set of alternative principles for the organisation of society and the economy. We call for the creation of a system that is consistent with the principles of liberty, equality and solidarity, called anarchist or libertarian communism. Libertarian communism means the common ownership of the means of production and the free association of producers. The implementation of libertarian communism can only be through the free federation of productive and communal organizations, not through the reform or recreation of a state apparatus.

We recognise and value the critiques of the 19th century that critiqued the exploitation of workers at the point of production. However, the development of capital has progressed to the point where all spheres of life are being submitted to the logic of exchange; and, contemporaneously, social struggles have developed beyond the point of production. In the struggle for libertarian communism, we therefore find it necessary to endorse the organisation of struggle against all forms of oppression, happening within the workplace and throughout society. Class fighters are to be found both at the point of production and wherever in society capitalism has wrought destruction, leaving behind a refuse of broken communities, a broken environment, and broken individuals. We recognise the need to organise against colonialism and racism, patriarchy, and heteronormativity and homophobia. We unconditionally reject the call for all groups in struggle, of various nations and class fractions, to organise themselves behind a single hegemonic proletarian project as potentially and actually totalitarian. Libertarian communism will be the collective creation of our democratic organisations, or it will not be.

We intend *Melbourne Black* as a concrete political intervention into this historical terrain. To create a movement for liberation out of a situation of oppression, to create shared visions for how to organise our world out of heterogeneity and diversity, we see the need for constant self-critique and reflection on the part of activists

and their organisations. This project for self-education is inseparably linked to the process of self-empowerment. *Melbourne Black* is therefore a forum for the movement, a place where, in the words of the IWA, we can organise `revolutionary struggle in all countries with the aim of destroying once and for all the present political and economic regimes and to establish libertarian communism._ To those who would like to join us in this project by participation in our editorial collective, we have developed the following set of requirements for all editors.

1. Support for the project of libertarian communism

2. Apply at one of our editorial meetings. Admission is at the discretion of the collective.

3. Participate in monthly editorial meetings, as regularly as possible. These meetings are open to writers and other interested persons, but all final decisions are in the hands of the editors' collective. This is because the job includes the sometimes unpleasant tasks of rejecting articles, or demanding substantial revisions prior to publication.

4. Assist with the logistical tasks of the journal: writing, soliciting and editing articles; proofreading and laying out each issue; printing and distribution; and (heaven willing) advertising and fundraising.

5. Agree to participate in the collective, to be run along non-hierarchical lines and using consensus-based decision-making. (If you are unfamiliar with these processes but would still like to get involved, drop us an e-mail and we'll have a chat).

CONTEXUALISING THE DECLARATION OF THE SOLIDARITY DELEGATION

BY SEAMUS

Following this article is the declaration of the 12-person delegation which toured Colombia in mid-July, hosted by the union SINALTRAINAL. The organisation of the delegation was jointly managed by LASNET and SINALTRAINAL, and the participating unions were the ETU, MUA, and CFMEU. The declaration represents the culmination of our two-week journey, which consisted of a series of meetings organised by SINALTRAINAL between the delegation and various grassroots groups and unions around the country. While much of the document speaks for itself, I wish to offer some explanation of how it was written and why it takes the form it does.

The document itself went through three drafts. The first draft was written by the President of SINALTRAINAL. It included specific demands, particularly in Solidarity with the Wayuu and protesting against the surveillance of activists, that were of special concern to SINALTRAINAL. It was essentially a single list. I offered to redraft it, giving it its current four-part form (calling out our enemies; naming the crimes, which are more common than you'd believe; supporting our allies; and framing an alternative vision). I also added a few demands I felt need to be included. I believe the lines about paramilitary groups were my addition; for Colombians, I guess it goes without saying, but an Australian audience probably needs reminding. This draft was submitted to review by the Australian unionists and several

officers of SINALTRAINAL. Several relatively obscure passages I had included (like the music teacher I met at one union branch; I was somewhat overexcited) were stricken; demands for freedom to organise and a denunciation of Colombia's `paper democracy_ were added by Australian unionists. So the declaration is a combination of the politics of LASNET, SINALTRAINAL, and the Australian unionists.

Take a moment to read the document before continuing with this article. Does it sound like a revolutionary document to you? Is the influence of revolutionary politics immediately obvious? I must admit, to me, it seems like a fairly mild declaration, with a strong resemblance to a travel itinerary. We are supporting the implementation of, I suppose, a `reformist_ program. We are protesting against only the most outrageous abuses by the ruling class; there is not a word of the exploitation and violence implicit in hierarchies of class, race, or gender. Glance at the list of principles at the end; it is pretty compatible with a functioning liberal democracy (in theory). And all we seem to really call for is a functioning liberal democracy. Yet I believe this is a revolutionary demand. To understand this, we must understand Colombia's history. Colombia was colonised by the Spanish from the fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries. Spain in the fifteenth century was emerging from the *Reconquista*, the crusades that retook Iberia for a Christian aristocracy (where it had previously been predominantly Islamic, but also Christian and Jewish). The Church, a landowner and defender of landowners, kept Spain deeply conservative and feudal through a series of violent interventions, such as the Inquisition and the counter-reformation (which was in fact pan-European, along with the periodic suppression of heretic sects). It was this Spain that colonised the Americas. It quickly created in the Americas new classes of landowners and military-bureaucratic elite, based respectively on feudal landowners and the Spanish court. This system was supported through the *encomienda*. It most closely resembled European serfdom. A lord is given claim to a piece of land. He builds his house there. The people who work that land, who live on that land, are part of the land. They are, therefore,

also possessions of their lord. Fresh from the *Reconquista*, where the lives and property of Muslims and Jews were held to be worthless, it was easy for Spain to hold the heathen inhabitants of the New World rather cheaply. Indigenous people were either forced to give up the produce of their farms.[1] The most liberal position in the Spanish church is held to be that of Bartolome de las Casas, a Franciscan friar. He argued that the Indian was actually human, and was therefore entitled to the word of God, and to be treated by Christian law (and so end the mass repression in forcing the Indian to farm and mine for the landlord). He advocated their replacement with African slaves, who were regarded as fair game even by the Church progressives (even those radical exiles, the Protestants, found this theologically viable from New Haven to Atlanta). So much for J.C.

The landowners, the bureaucrats, and the generals have always been armed, with state and private forces. In order to control the Indigenous and African labourers, arms and ideology were vital (though disease did a lot of the work too). Arms were needed to suppress armed rebellion, it is true, but an organised body of armed men also allows one to surveil the population, punish theft or perceived laziness, break up conspiracies, and guard the supplies of expropriated wealth (usually in the form of luxury items from Spain, capital investment was scant). The Church everywhere needed to preach submission. At first, the Franciscans went for mass conversion. Later, Dominicans would try to introduce a bit more theological rigour, having found an astonishing number of heretical doctrines among the `converted._ It was this class that led the revolution against Spain. Simon Bolivar, the mythic figure of liberation, was from a slaveowning landowning family. In order to make the revolution, however, this class had to form an alliance with the oppressed masses. The oligarchy was too small to make an army without them. This class alliance expelled the Spanish viceroyality (with the Atlantic ocean as a supply line, the rebels already had an advantage). But now the ruling

1 And they were their farms: it was Indigenous people who had to teach colonising Europeans how to farm Indigenous crops, like potatoes and maize, in Indigenous soils. This was equally true for the English, French, and Dutch.

class was called upon to fulfil it's promises. Bolivar had called for the abolition of slavery, universal citizenship, and the establishment of a powerful, centralised, and progressive state. It was the height of bourgeois liberal idealism. But when the ruling class was called upon to deliver its ideals, it panicked. Bolivar was confronted by an army of pretenders, and New Granada split up into the states of Colombia, Ecuador, Panama, and Bolivia.

Colombia, one of the successor states, realised it needed a new army to suppress its own mobilised and armed populace. Over the succeeding hundred years, it made deals with first the British and then the Americans. The foreigners provided military support in return for generous land and financial concessions (and through financial capital, industrial interests). The English landlords enjoyed much the same rights as the Spanish ones, except that they came to be protected by American marines rather than private militias. From the 1960s, however, there was a change in American imperial strategy. In 1962, the `Peasant and Student Movement Guerilla Force_ organised in Colombia, one of a series of reactions to the success of the Cuban revolution. The Americans, reacting to the insecurity Cuban-style social change would negatively impact investment opportunities, advised the creation of paramilitaries. Of course, the nucleus was already there, from Colombia's imperial history, but the Americans provided modern military training (for people who had never needed to be more than thugs), modern arms, and coordinated military support. From 1977-1986, the paramilitaries were officially legal institutions, supporting the state against the guerilla. Unofficially, of course, they came to support international capital against the people. At this time, members of the Colombian landowning class had began to dabble in the Cocaine trade. In the eighties, as profits rose, a set of cartels grew to dominate the industry. It wasn't until they used `Bogotá rules_ on the streets of Miami that the United States took notice. A demonstration was needed to show the American people that the United States disapproved of gangsters, and to show Colombia who would be running the show. The paramilitaries were outlawed by

the client government, and one section of the narco-landowners was used to crush another section (Escobar and his allies, not even the whole of the Medellin cartel).

Bring on the 1990s, Bill Clinton and Monica Lewinski, Kosovo, Al Qaeda's first moves (did they vote Republican?), human rights, and America as the world's cop (with deputy NATO) on behalf of international capital. This policing role is vital to understand. While America will of course continue to intervene in the interests of American capitalists (though Iraq is showing the costs of too naked an imperialism), it increasingly intervenes in the interest of stateless capital, capital flowing across borders aided by 24-hour internet banking and crumbling trade barriers, that is, the general interests of capital as a historic tendency distinct from capitalist classes as such. Its designs in Colombia have shifted to reflect this. The paramilitaries were officially demobilised under the Peace and Justice law. In actuality, this functioned more as an amnesty for paramilitary crimes, and most paramilitaries merely reorganised as private security firms. The Americans have fourteen military bases in the country, supposedly to fight guerillas, in actuality deployed to threaten Venezuela and Brazil. The army and the paramilitaries continue to cooperate in operational matters, and paramilitary leaders have also taken the public offices suiting their wealth and power. This has become something of a national scandal: public officials are being sent to prison for murder. Officially, Colombia is a model republic, with one of the most progressive constitutions in the world (it has no death penalty, for instance). Murdering activists, genocide, and narco-trafficking are, of course, illegal. But when the killing needs to be done, all of the forces of law and order, the all-seeing eye of the state bureaucracy, conveniently absents itself. We have a situation, like that which Marx observed in France in 1852, where the republic has had to abolish itself to save itself. The bourgeoisie has abolished its own class rule to assure its class interests.

So in this situation, to demand the effective functioning of the bourgeois republic is to demand the cancellation of bourgeois class interests. An effective republic would probably look something

Salsa Dancing in the SINALTRAINAL office under the ever present gaze of Che.

like Venezuela, with expropriation of some foreign interests, the redistribution of some wealth, and the legitimation of some social movements. In other words, investment hell. Our list of demands, however, is not a naïve optimism in the power of social democracy. While this declaration could be satisfied by concessions from the state and capital, it does not anticipate it. We condemn the offences, but we do not ask for the state to correct them. We laud the movements to rebuild lives, but we do not ask the state to recognise them. The message is implicitly an ultimatum: Feed our children, Punish the murderers, Expel the invaders, or we will do it ourselves. SINALTRAINAL's strategy of reaching out to a range of social movements (the declaration names several of these, but is far from exhaustive) and supporting experiments in mutual aid is about building the techniques for `doing it ourselves._ Bit by bit, people are deciding to

live on their own resources. The time for the state's expulsion will come by fragments. The Zapatistas have tried in Mexico. Colombians are building space where the movement, not the government, provides law and security. Expect this tendency to spread. The people are not instinctive revolutionaries, but their rulers will have it no other way.

When I wrote my draft, I was thinking of the *cahiers de doleances* of pre-revolutionary France. Negri describes how these lists of grievances, some numbering in the hundreds of purely local concerns, brought out the contradiction between the King's role as protector of the people and his commitment to privilege. The *cahiers* were a tocsun before the attack; seemingly worthless when viewed at their time, but with the hindsight of history a deadly warning, a foreshadowing of what was to come. When I wrote this draft, I thought of myself as participating in one of these moments of history. Selfishly perhaps, I wanted my name in this chapter; not to say I was important (anyone could have written it, and what I wrote was not particularly impressive, I can see a hundred edits to style and wording I would make now) but that I was present at an important event in the global organisation of the multitude. In retrospect, perhaps, that feeling might be dismissed as romanticism, as a loss of perspective. I'm not sure it is; it is an exaggeration at most, the work we are doing will, I'm sure, reap its fruits in good time. But on the other hand, you have to understand I was drinking like ten cups of coffee a day.

My thanks go to Carlos Olaya, educational officer of SINALTRAINAL, and Tristan Platt of the University of St Andrews. Most of my knowledge of the colonisation of Latin America comes from their excellent lectures. The errors and flights of fancy are my own.

AUSTRALIAN SOLIDARITY DELAGATION TO COLOMBIA

-FINAL STATEMENT & COMMITMENTS-

THE FOLLOWING ARE THE DECLARATIONS OF THE DELEGATION OF AUSTRALIAN TRADE UNIONISTS FROM THE MUA, ETU AND CFMEU, THE LATIN AMERICAN SOLIDARITY NETWORK (LASNET) AND SOCIAL ACTIVISTS, WHO, HOSTED BY SINALTRAINAL, TRAVELLED WITHIN COLOMBIA BETWEEN THE 12 AND THE 28 OF JULY, 2010.

First, we declare the following to be lies:

ðThat it is multinational companies, rather than the people, who develop the country and its economy.

ðThat it is the government, and not the movement of the people, that is the source of democracy in the country.

ðThat it is the social movements of workers, indigenous people, students, women, the poor, and the excluded that are responsible for the violence that mars Colombian society.

ðThat the violence in Colombian society is a result of crime and lawlessness, rather than a campaign carefully orchestrated by multinational corporations, paramilitary organisations, and organs of the state to ensure their political and economic dominance over the country.

ðThe guarantees of the Colombian constitution and laws to human rights, rights of free

association, environmental protection, and justice in cases of murder or other forms of aggression; without any real enforcement, they are but a stack of false promises.

Second, in light of massive evidence of malpractice by such companies as BHP-Billiton, British Petroleum, Coca-Cola, Nestlé, Kraft and others, we declare our condemnation of the following practices and commit ourselves to internationally denouncing them:

ðThe use of violence, intimidation, disappearances, torture, and assassination as tools of intimidation against unions and social organisations, constituting a crime of aggression, committed by some association of illegal paramilitary groups and the armed forces of the Colombian state. We express our particular outrage at the murders of 22 SINALTRAINAL activists.
ðThe especially violent treatment of teachers and other educational workers.
ðThe use of casual employment, sub-contracting, cooperatives, precarious employment, and mass firings as weapons to destroy union organisations and suppress wages and working conditions. In particular, we deplore the firing of six SINALTRAINAL organisers by Casa Luker to prevent them from organising their workplace.
ðThe activities of the Colombian state that support the paramilitary campaign of violence against union and social activists. These include the provision of impunity or amnesty for murders, the notorious cases of the ¨false positives", and wiretapping and surveillance against activists, with documented cases of information-sharing with paramilitary organisations.
ðActs of aggression, including forced displacement, against peasants and indigenous peoples for any purposes, including mining concessions to such companies as BHP Billiton or British Petroleum. We express particular concern over the rights of the Wayuu people of the Guajira department, and the Kankuamo people of the Valledupar department, the community of the Virgin of the Rock near Sabana Bogota, and the people living in the vicinity of the Cerrejón Mine.
ðThe total disregard shown by the government and by private companies for the human rights,

workers´ rights, land rights, and wellbeing of the people. We are particularly concerned of the rights of mining workers, especially those of the GenCorp division of BHP Billiton.
ðThe use of poverty and deprivation as political and moral weapons against the people.
ðThe total disregard shown by the multinationals for the environment resulting in its wholesale destruction.
ðActs of U.S. imperialism including the imposition of free-trade agreements, which undermine national sovereignty, and the current presence of seven military bases, with more being discussed in intergovernmental talks.

Third, we laud the efforts of, and vow political, moral, and material solidarity to, the following movements in Colombia:

ðUnions and other movements that struggle for the rights of workers, particularly our friends and hosts, SINALTRAINAL.
ðThe creation of projects for the education of communities, both the young and the old. We lend especial support to the Manuela Beltran School in Valledupar, and the Proyecto Educativo Sintrapimenticia.
ðExpressions of resilience by the Colombian people through cultural forms, particularly la Fundación Hector Daniel Useche Baron in Bugalagrande, and the cultural work of La Casa de Maize in Sabana Bogotá.
ðThe development of women˘s´ groups and committees, both to advance the rights of women and as part of the wider social movement.
ðThe work of organisations towards respect for human rights, the admission of past crimes, and for truth and justice in Colombia, including the Lawyers˘ Collective Alvear Restrepo, MOVICE (the movement of the victims), and the Committee for Solidarity with Political Prisoners.
ðOrganisations working for the rights of indigenous people, against displacement, violence, and genocide, such as ONIC and the Minga.
ðFinally, outside of but in solidarity with Colombia, the efforts of the Latin American Solidarity Network (LASNET) to organise a solidarity gathering in Melbourne Australia entitled ¯Defending Workers and Indigenous Rights_, ¨Building Bridges and Global Resistance against Multinational Corporations¨ from 12-14

November 2010. Colombian activists are encouraged to participate in the conference by sending delegates and by writing statements for the conference to consider.

Finally, we envision a world characterised by the following principles, a world which we believe it is both possible and morally imperative to realise:

ðDemocracy. The rule of all by all, rather than the rule of the many by the few.
ðPeace. Security and freedom from fear.
ðWellbeing. Access to good food, clean water, healthcare, housing, education, and a healthy environment.
ðSocial security. Secure employment, a secure retirement, a standard of living in conformance with human dignity, and good prospects for future generations.
ðSovereignty. The right of every community to have the deciding voice in their own lives and the use of their lands, free from coercive interference by foreign governments, multinational corporations, or unaccountable organs of government.
ðJustice. The protection of the rights of all, and accountability and reparations from those who commit acts of violence against the people.
ðFreedom to Organise. The guaranteed rights to form or join unions or social movements, to collectively address wrongs and grievances, to engage in acts of civil disobedience, industrial action, or public mobilisation; and to enjoy these rights without the threat of violence.

We affirm this declaration on Saturday, the 27th of July, 2010, in the Bogotá offices of SINALTRAINAL, and in so doing initiate a mutual relationship of friendship, affinity, and solidarity.

NEW DEATH THREATS AGAINST THE SINALTRAINAL EXECUTIVE

WE HAVE PUSHED BACK PUBLISHING ON MELBOURNE BLACK 4 A BIT SO AS TO INCLUDE A RECENT UPDATE ON THE ONGOING VIOLENCE AND INTIMIDATION AGAINST COLOMBIA'S SINALTRAINAL.

ON WEDNESDAY, 29TH SEPTEMBER 2010, WE RECEIVED (VIA LASNET) A STATEMENT FROM EDGAR PAEZ AND DURBAN VELEZ, ON BEHALF OF SINALTRAINAL, OUTLINING THAT A NUMBER OF UNION MEMBERS HAD RECEIVED NEW DEATH THREATS IN THE MAIL (HOW FORMAL!) FROM A PARAMILITARY DEATH SQUAD. WE HAVE EDITED IT FOR READABILITY, AND REPRINTED IT BELOW:

In a statement (the second) appearing during the morning of September 25th 2010 in the of Cauca, Colombia, the *Aguilas Negras* (:Black Eagles˘, a paramilitary death squad) threatened with death the following members of the SINALTRAINAL executive - Javier Correa, Edgar Paez, Fabio Olaya, Jairo Mendez, Rafael Esquivel and Martin Agudelo.

Some events that happened before this new death threat appeared:

1. On September 17th, we organised a day of protest in all the Nestle factories in Colombia (Valledupar, Mosquera, Dosquebradas and Bugalagrande), in commemoration of the fifth anniversary of the assassination of Luciano Enrique Romero Molina, which occurred in Valledupar on September 11th, 2005. Luciano was a SINALTRAINAL leader and Nestle employee.

2. On September 17th, at approximately 4:30 a.m., a suspicious person was detected outside of sport complex *Carlos Arturo Zamora*, owned by SINALTRAINAL in Valledupar. This person left the premises when realising the presence of some union security guards. A number of members of SINALTRAINAL Executive reside near this complex.

3. On September 20th, at approximately 5:00 pm., two unknown men entered the union headquarters in Bugalagrande and when members of security addressed them, they argued they had been sent to sign a contract. Subsequently two motorbikes with three unknown individuals arrived in the union headquarters; they were suspiciously observing who were inside and outside of the facilities. When they noticed the presence of union security they left the premises.

4. This is not the first time that SINALTRAINAL leaders that work in Nestle, Coca Cola and other companies received death threats; we have denounced these threats to the Colombian authorities. Until today we don't know the results of the investigations that will allow us to know who was responsible.

5. On September 7th, in the middle of all the security and surveillance that the company Nestle Purina Pet Care has in their facilities located in the municipality of Mosquera - Cundinamarca, an anonymous communiqué was found that creates confusion, discredits and denigrates SINALTRAINAL and its leaders.

We have made all the relevant legal claims requesting the investigation and subsequent punishment of all those responsible for these threats, for the protection of life and integrity of all the SINALTRAINAL affiliates and their families, and to guarantee the right to freedom of association.

6. We ask those in solidarity in Australia, especially the Solidarity delegation from

Australia who visited us last July and stayed in our premises to disseminate this information on all levels as possible, in order to protect and safeguard the lives of our comrades and our union.

With the visit of Carlos Olaya to Australia to the *Latin American, Australian and Asia Pacific Solidarity Gathering*, next November 12-14, our Union will have the international support needed at this moment, and once more thanks for your constant solidarity.

Duban Velez & Edgar Paez,
on behalf of the National Executive

We ask you to send notes of condemnation of this serious situation (cc: lasnet@latinlasnet.org) to:

Ana María Humanos Sánchez
Jefe de Recursos Humanos del Área Andina de Nestlé (Head of Human Resources of Nestle)
anamaria.sanchez@co.nestle.com

Angelino Garzón
Vice-president of Colombia
comunicacionesvp@presidencia.gov.co

Hernán Jaime Ulloa Venegas
Director of the Presidential Program of Human rights and Humanitarian International Rights
hernanulloa@presidencia.gov.co

FURTHER DETAILS:

To contact the SINALTRAINAL National Executive;

areainternacional@sinaltrainal.org

More info in Spanish:

http://www.sinaltrainal.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1294&Itemid=1

Below is the link to a copy (in Spanish) of the death threats:

http://www.sinaltrainal.org/images/stories/campo1/amenaza.jpg

LATIN AMERICAN, AUSTRALIAN & ASIA PACIFIC SOLIDARITY GATHERING

-DEFENDING WORKERS' AND INDIGENOUS RIGHTS-

"BUILDING BRIDGES AND GLOBAL RESISTANCE AGAINST MULTINATIONAL CORPORATIONS"

FOR THREE DAYS- NOVEMBER 12-14, 2010- GRASSROOTS ACTIVISTS & INDIGENOUS REPRESENTATIVES FROM A RANGE OF ORGANISATIONS, COMMUNITIES AND MOVEMENTS WILL SHARE IDEAS, EXPERIENCES AND STORIES OF STRUGGLE INSIDE THEIR OWN COUNTRIES AGAINST GLOBAL CAPITALISM.

The abhorrent business practices of Multinational Corporations, and the struggles against them, will be the central focus of this gathering. It follows that space will be created for discussions on the implications of Free Trade agreements (Australia-Colombia and others) , the imposition of the Initiative for the Integration of Regional Infrastructure in South America (IIRSA), the implementation of US plans for Central and North America, and more broadly,

capitalist globalisation. Our purpose in coming together is to educate ourselves and one another in order to build new, global models of solidarity to combat global corporate tyranny.

Corporations around the world act as a law unto their own. We see this play out in our myriad struggles. In coming together at this conference, we hope to share our experiences from Australia, Asia Pacific and Latin America.

We are operating from the perspective that Multinational Corporations and the above mentioned initiatives serve only to benefit the privileged few at the expense of the majority; to reinforce exploitation of poor people, smash unionism and undermine workers˘ rights, terrorise and murder union activists, displace and assimilate Indigenous communities, and trash our natural resources and environment.

While many activists have long lists of complaints against Multinational Corporations, we are focussing the conference on the following companies- BHP, Rio Tinto, Barrick Gold, Coca-Cola, Fonterra, Chiquita Brand, Monsanto, Drummond, Nestle, BP- whose crimes are well-known.

We acknowledge the proliferation of local struggles for workers˘ rights/community power, autonomy and self-management, for freedom from corporate domination and devastation.

In order to learn from these struggles and celebrate their achievements, we have secured speakers from:

Colombia's SINALTRAINAL
Copper workers' confederation from Chile
Indigenous communities from Colombia
Indigenous Mapuche – Diaguitas from Chile
CONAIE- Indigenous national organisation from Ecuador
Communal peoples from Venezuela
Landless Workers' Movement from Brazil (MST)
Indigenous representative from NT opposing intervention
Representatives of Australian Aboriginal communities
New Zealand Maori representatives
West Papuan representatives
Bougainville Indigenous fighting Rio Tinto
William Osmar Chamagua, Director of Radio Mi gente from El Salvador

However, we also must acknowledge the limitations of locally defined struggles. In order to realise their objectives, these campaigns must grow in such a way so they can defy a capital that is global in its scope and aspirations. Against this power that has no morality, we must construct a power of our own.

Therefore, the conference will commit itself to building new, practical models of solidarity that are global in scale. It is insufficient to come together and merely recognise or sympathise with one another. The schedule of the conference will be designed with this practical goal in mind: moving beyond building awareness and towards creating effective and empowering models of global resistance.

We desire your involvement both at this gathering and in assisting to organise it.

Objectives of this Gathering:
· To share experiences of struggle to inform and build solidarity.
· Achieve a clear resolution on united and internationalist action against corporate tyranny.
· To explore developing a popular/community tribunal/watchdog to monitor and disseminate publicly on the behaviour of Multinationals.

We acknowledge that struggles are won when oppressed peoples regain control over their everyday lives. We, therefore, desire the creation of an inclusive international network focused on achieving these results. If you want to be part of this discussion come with a model or ideas.

FURTHER DETAILS:

Melbourne:
Trades Hall,
12-14 November, 2010

Sydney:
Unions NSW,
26, 27 November, 2010

For more details please visit:
http://www.latinlasnet.org/

http://solidaritygathering2010.wordpress.com/

ELECTION SPECIAL: GOVERNMENT GETS IN

Graffiti in Redfern, courtesy of someone who posted it on facebook. Neither of us voted, but you know... – eds.

A TALE OF SAND, AND THOSE WHO FEED FROM IT:

BY SAKSI (FREE ASSOCIATION OF ANARCHISTS AND FRIENDS OF KULON PROGO'S BRAVE PEASANTS)

HISTORY AND ETNOGRAPHIC EXPLANATION OF KULON PROGO'S VILLAGE AND RESISTANCE.

TRANSLATED & REPRINTED FROM 'JURNAL AMOR FATI' #3.

Sand defines the life story of those who live along Kulon Progo's southern shoreline.

Up to the present day, this sand has nourished thousands of souls along the coastal fringe of Kulon Progo regency, Yogyakarta province. The story starts before 1942, when coastal dwellers were already trying to turn the sand into a source of sustenance. Notes taken from the oral history of Arjo Dimejo, a villager from Karang Sewu, reveal that before that date many of his fellow villagers survived by planting rice, sweet potatoes, potatoes and beans on the coastal sands.

Yet when the Japanese colonisers arrived, the inhabitants were forbidden to use the sand as agricultural land, as the Japanese suspected that they were secretly making sea salt. But after Indonesia was proclaimed an independent nation, as soon as Japan no longer stood watching over the sand lands, a few villagers

moved back to once again look for sustenance from the sand. Arjo Dimejo relates that in 1948 President Soekarno made a visit to the coastal strip, and invited the people to make use of the land. So the local people, most of whom were farmers, thronged to work this land whose soil was merely sand. At one point in the 1970s storms wreaked havoc on the land and the homes built upon it. Yet despite these bad conditions the farmers managed to survive, still determined to eat from what the sand could provide.

Those that live from the sand are called 'cubung' by other people, a derisory stereotype which means backward or inferior village people, prone to sickness. And in fact, in past decades, the combination of the sun's heat and strong blasts of wind meant that many inhabitants experienced diseases of the skin, respiratory system, stomach or eyes.

The coast dwellers farmed land without soil, only sand, hoping that the rainwater that falls for free onto the earth would be make the land fertile; their living conditions were always precarious. Until the 1980s agriculture along the coastal zone remained extremely marginal. All that would grow on the sand were certain vine plants. And then only in the rainy season; in the dry season they would all die. Drought forced many farmers to instead look for work as wage labourers in other places, even if it meant

leaving Java ¯ usually they would return 6 to 12 months later. Until the 1980s the term 'cubung' was still being frequently used. However, during those years the inhabitants greatly increased their effort to find natural ways that the sand could provide food, every day inhaling sand to for the sake of survival.

Visiting your neighbours breeds collective wisdom.

Nearly every evening, the people mocked as 'cubung' greatly enjoy 'Endong-endongan'. This is a custom of the villagers to gather together at neighbours' houses, and relate their experiences to the others present(1). According to Iman Rejo, a villager from Bugel, this is their way to strive to fulfil all of life's needs, whether material or spiritual, and whether they are directly conscious of doing so or not. When the inhabitants meet each evening they create the feeling that they are no longer on their own. Moments like these are embryos from which the farmers' motivation can grow, the will to persevere and enhance their lives. These 'endong-endongan' are meetings of friends, tend to be non-hierarchical, and they happen spontaneously and habitually each evening. They are a moment to take heart and to find new ideas together.

`On the positive side these heart-to-heart meetings to support each other and share experiences came from an idea of three villagers (Iman Rejo, Pardiman, Musdiwiyono) to try to find different techniques and systems to make use of the extremely marginal sand lands._ (2)

Nightly endong-endongan meetings in different people's houses create relationships of trust between individuals in these difficult conditions. They start to speak together about the problems they face and look at ways to solve them together. Before each farmer would cultivate the land on their own, but later they felt the need to work together instead to find new ways of cultivation. It also turned out that their experiences from other places when they were working on the land or as skilled labour gave them new points to share and discuss.

Various ideas also emerged from the meetings of individuals and from farmers' groups to study the nature of the land and the possibilities it offered. In 1984 a group of farmers helped each other out to build simple

wells in the fields. Because sand moves so easily, they dug very wide, with a diameter of up to 5 meters and a depth of 5-8 meters and inserted a tube made from bamboo. The well was completed with a bamboo hoist. As soon as each well was completed in turn, the farmers started to prepare the land: hoeing, building dams, fertilising with manure, and then later planting. All this technology and land preparation was carried out by the community themselves, working together.

The farmers experiments are always based on close observation of nature. They tried planting corn using different methods of watering, and different ways and locations to grow acacia trees - each careful attempt in accordance with their observations of the nature of the land. Until one day when one farmer walking in the field noticed a chilli plant growing well near a coconut tree. This discovery prompted other farmers to start planting and tending chilli, building up their experience as they went. Eventually they built up an in-depth knowledge of how to cultivate the land, without the need of any teachers ¯ the impetus came from their initiative to organise the farmers' groups. Nowadays the number of farmer's groups has expanded greatly, currently there are several dozen.

The farmers solved their shortage of water by building wells. These were originally very simply made, making holes 5 meters deep and retaining them with bamboo. Later the bamboo was exchanged for cement and finally concrete. Previously they dug each well very deep, and needed a bucket for watering. However the farmers felt this method was not effective. Later farmers tried building a principal well with a water pump, connected by bamboo to tanks made from a concrete box/pipe. As this was still inadequate, the bamboo canalization was later exchanged for PVC. Although the products used may be modern, they are used with an understanding of the natural characteristics of the coastal zone.

The problem of strong winds is tackled by using plants that act as wind-breakers around the cultivated plots, such as castor oil plant, bitter gourd or aubergine. They also plant coconut near the fields to help breaking the wind so the plants are not blown away by strong gusts. Before cultivation, the

land was terraced sand dunes which looked like a desert strewn with bushes and thickets, always moving around whenever the waves hit. But this natural condition can be managed by the farmers co-operating, flattening the land and removing the undergrowth, making sure to leave one row of sand dunes between the ocean and the cultivated land.

There are many ways in which their experience leads to knowledge worth relating, but they do not need to be mentioned one by one. What is sure is that the farmers have undergone a long and dynamic process, where the key to survival on the land was never obvious. They had been forbidden to farm, battered by wind every day and sometimes by storms, their land dominated by sand dunes, and troubled by sickness. Yet by the custom of meeting together, discussing and sharing, they found they were no longer buried by the sand, emerging to find new survival strategies and share their strengths with each other every day.

For a long time the farmers have had difficulties to face, yet they have always been able to resolve their problems in an independent and autonomous way, without the help of outsiders, especially the government. Even the roads to the fields, which previously were difficult to pass, they built on their own. First they built simple roads by laying stones, but eventually laid asphalt - working together to build the roads themselves, pooling their money to meet the costs, all with no help from the government. That is how the farmers will always explain it when asked what's the role of the government. Moreover they never experience conflict over who can work which land. The farmers know that the right to farm is something they hold in common, and there are never disputes about the status of the land, they just sort it out between themselves. The relationships of trust between individuals and the farmer's group is a long way beyond that of businessmen who have to sanctify everything with legal contracts, stamped and sealed. The careful efforts of more than 40 years have made the wasteland a fertile and productive zone. All sorts of plants can now thrive due to the hard work and care put into their cultivation. On the sand a range of horticultural crops can grow in both the rainy season and the

dry season. Chilli, aubergine, bitter gourd, castor bean, green beans, rice, corn, watermelon and many other types of vegetables are grown along the 25km stretch of shoreline; the hands of the farmers have turned the landscape green. The key to their success is collective knowledge, whether it be knowledge of modern technology or local wisdom about when and how to plant, tend and harvest the crops.

The chilli has become the prime commodity for farmers in the area. However they also plant other crops according to the season. Each group of farmers continues to discuss which crop to plant first, followed by which other crop. Every year farmers in each group discuss when to plant. Their discussion takes in various perspectives, from their belief in the Javanese calender, to the condition of the land, sea and sky, and the possibility of clashes of harvesting time with other plants they may want to grow on the land.

Businessmen and landowners can also consume sand.

In 1964 a study analysing the composition of the sand was carried out by the geology faculty of ITB university. Led by In Junas, it measured the iron content of the sands and ground water depth. They made boreholes in the sand to a depth of 4-7 metres. Some local people were asked to work on this study as manual labour, and they remembered that below the sand lay iron and water.(3)

This memory was what the farmers would eventually use when they started to make changes in their lives 20 years later, almost as if they were stealing the knowledge from the outsiders' research. Iman Rejo, Pardiman and Musdiwiyono took the initiative to get people together to build wells to sustain life. Under the soil they found fresh, clear, not salty water, although they were only a few metres from the beach. With the wells built, the villagers work brought life to the wasteland. But this memory becomes very different when it is written into an academic report, then read by a land owner and passed on to corporations. Just as the land started to become fertile, provide food, and even allow farmers to be able to send their children to higher education, was also the moment when a stroke of enlightenment suddenly shook the brain cells of a certain entrepreneur and those

that claim authority over the land of Kulon Progo. They want the sand to nourish their needs as well. The partnership they created was given the name of PT JMM (Jogja Magasa Mining).

On Thursday, 6 October 2005, at 20.15 West Indonesia Time, an imaginary voice ripped through the dreams of the farmers. `There is iron within the womb of the sandy shoreline, and it is time for it to come out, to be exploited, to be enjoyed not only by farmers, but by us all, for the sake of our society at large, for the race and for the nation_ is more or less how the voice in the imaginary meeting room sounded, a moment before the arrival of a notarised document from PT Jogja Magasa Mining

To attain these aim and objectives the company can carry out business activities as follows:

a. Business activities in the sector of general mining, including the mining of iron sand, iron ore, sea sand and coal.
b. Carry out trade, including import, export and interinsular trade, acting as a representative agent, sole agent, distributor, supplier of the products of mining such as iron sands, iron ore, sea sand and coal, whether on its own account or on another's account, by means of commission.
c. Establish industrial facilities for the obtaining and processing of mining products such as iron sand, iron ore, sea sand and coal.
d. Provide services in the mining sector.
e. Undertake transportation of the products of mining activity, by means of truck.(4)

From the sound of the document, PT JMM appear to have been granted legal authority by the state for the total exploitation of the land through their mining enterprise. But this company,PT JMM had only just been formed and was still new to the mining business. They needed experience in mineral exploitation and additional capital(5), and so

needed to join with another company as business partner. In an interview with Lutfi Hayder(6) (commissioner of Jogja Magasa Iron) the company joined with an Australian company, Indo Mines Limited(7), and the corporation Australia Kimberly Diamond also made capital investments, as did other investors. The collaboration between the companies PT Jogja Magasa Iron, Indo Mines and the other investors was called JMI (Jogja Magasa Iron)(8), although recently this name changed again to JMI (Jogja Magasa International).

Systematic steps have already been taken by the business partnership and those who claim authority over Kulon Progo to ensure the success of their iron mining venture. Lufti Hayder, acting as commissioner for Jogja Magasa Iron claims they have already found considerable financial backing, although the world economy is hit by recession. Funding to complete the feasibility study is already available; it is estimated this is sufficient for 12-18 months.

Farmers fight the corporation.

At the start of 2007 the shoreline residents were becoming restless about the planned mining project. This nervousness soon spread, as farmers worried about losing the land that had supported them for so long. They shared their fears from one to another and also within their farmers' groups. Finally different farmers' groups, from various villages along the coastal strip, decided to meet and discuss the problem. So one night in April hundreds of farmers, delegates of their groups and villages, got together to determine attitudes towards the plans. That night farmers exchanged opinions and analysed their fears about the news of the mining plan. Clear evidence of the problem this iron mine would have on their livelihood was revealed that night

The discussion revolved around 3 possible approaches. Firstly, farmers could unconditionally accept the mining plan. Second, that they could accept but with certain conditions and stipulations. Thirdly, they could unconditionally reject the proposal. In the end it turned out that not a single individual was

Riot Porn: 20 October 2009, Wates, Kulon Progo, Yogyakarta.
A rally of around 2000 coastal farmers connected to the PPLP.

in favour of the first option, and not a single individual was in favour of the second option. All the farmers present that night made clear their unconditional opposition to any plan to mine iron sand from their land.

That night the farmers also started planning their strategy to resist the iron mine. Their first act was to establish an umbrella organisation, which they named PPLP (Paguyaban Petani Lahan Pantai = Association of Shoreline Farmers). The organisation had an unusual structure. Aside from a chair, secretary and treasurer and their deputies, they also appointed older farmers as advisors. There is also a field coordinator in each village, who acts as a delegate, uniquely this coordinator is only ever one person, and they often rotate in a quite flexible way. Each village also has an autonomous PPLP unit, each with its own structure. What is clear is that there is no-one that holds authority in the PPLP structure. The whole coastal community are members of PPLP and their feelings about

new information in the mining plan is always discussed at the meetings of each PPLP unit as well as the umbrella meetings. One more unique feature is that there is no office for either the umbrella organisation or for each PPLP unit, as each household along the coast is a space for coordination.

PPLP henceforth started organising many actions. Initially they undertook traditional forms of struggle, involving old and the young in local traditions such as mujahadah, casting magic spells, farmers' rituals and night watch on the land. But neither their attempts at dialogue, nor their movement which declared itself anti-mining was considered as well behaved by the corporations or the local government (who are also involved as they administrate the local budget). On the quiet the villages were infiltrated by intel agents and paid thugs to intimidate the people.

Before the Ramadan fast, 24 August 2007, farmers agreed to attack the local authority of Kulon Progo. They were annoyed at this symbolic existence of authority over a land where there was never any justice or understanding of the people's aspirations. That day the farmers were able to fight the police and in the end thousands of people were able to enter the grounds of the symbol of power of the government of Kulon Progo regency. The farmers tore down the fence and forced the police to back away from the mass action. That day, not one key local official would meet with farmers, least of all the mayor. The farmers from PPLP threatened the mayor 5 times that day to come out with a declaration cancelling the mine project.

The farmers actions and demonstrations continue until now. They plan their strategies and tactics to foil the plan to mine iron from the coastal sands of Kulon Progo. The case of the farmers' resistance in Kulon Progo is an authentic example of a struggle against power characterised by anti-politics, autonomy and self-management. With regards to politicians and NGOs that want to get involved, we can say that there is a kind of agreement that the farmers' struggle should not become dependent on anyone. Between the sand and the iron it contains there is a raging fire, a fire that cannot be subdued, resisting exploitation and dehumanisation in whatever form it takes.

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6. Interview 12 March 2009

7. Application For Contract of Works from Government of the Republic of Indonesia

8. Plan of Work 2009 JMI, Jogjakarta 12 March 2009

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http://kulonprogotolaktambangbesi.wordpress.com

http://kpsolidarity.wordpress.com/

http://www.facebook.com/YogyakartaNoMining

Jurnal Amor Fati is available (not in English unfortunately) at:
http://www.zinelibrary.info/search/node/amor+fati

CO.HE.RE.VI

BY SEAMUS & GIFTZWERG

Consent, Healthy Relationships, and Violence was a series of workshops and seminars organised by a grassroots group, Stepping Up, in cooperation with activists at the Loophole Community Centre. It formed what I hope will be the first of many "community-based responses to sexual and interpersonal violence" (Stepping Up's own description of the project). The full programme for the day is available at http://coherevi.wordpress.com/, though "Violence and the importance of healing" was cancelled.

Drawing on anarchist, feminist, and queer theory, the organisers strove to create a non-coercive space where hierarchies could be critically examined and deconstructed, particularly those of gender and sexuality. Participation was genuinely voluntary, something which I tested as I got a feel for the event. People took their breaks and meals in the yard in the back of the centre. When there was a major announcement or a workshop, it would be announced from the back door. But when I decided to take my time, no one came and asked me why I was not inside. There were also trained mediators for grievances and `listening trees._ After searching in vain for a tree, I learned these were actually people with listening and counselling skills. My participation was invited, not demanded or expected. My work was to be social, of course, but its deeply personal dimension was also recognised.

This was a liberating experience as a learner, and it gave me the impression that my goals and decisions were genuinely respected. Workshops lasted a bit over an hour, in three sessions, with lunch prepared by Food Not Bombs. There were three streams of discussion, with a final session in the late afternoon for all participants. I must admit, the quality of facilitation varied. I felt that the best benefited from a clear structuring of time, and capitalised on learner experiences. I take the final session of the day, after the streamed workshops, as an example.

The seminar entitled `Community Response to Sexual Assault_ consisted of a series of exercises to get participants to think about what it means to feel safe, what a safe environment is, and what sorts of things are conducive to safety. There was a brainstorm around the theme of safety, in which participants variously identified it with being in control of and familiar with one's surroundings, material security, and social support in case of conflict or emergencies. The facilitator was easily able to draw out the lessons of the need for social solidarity and the gulf between popular and statist/capitalist conceptions of security. Even though these lessons are implicitly revolutionary, in that they develop people's capacities to run their lives without the state and capital, as well as building alternative networks of democratic power, they were clear and struck no one as radical, arising as they did out of their own experience. The brainstorm was followed by a kinaesthetic exercise on fear, confidence, and self-control, where people explored the corporal dimensions of fear and confidence. Again, the matter of education was the subjective experiences of the participants, collaboratively deconstructed and reconstructed. But at the end of the workshop, the facilitator put down his markers and put his back to the butcher's paper on the wall and took out a seven-point manifesto. They were somewhat roughly criticised and variously rejected as interesting but unsuitable. Debriefing later, my co-editor laughed about this, viewing it as just desserts for the crime of hippy shit (*Stand up and close my eyes? Get fucked.*) Having been impressed by the facilitator's earlier work (*Hitting five of Gardner's eight*

intelligences ain't bad is all I'm saying.), I wondered why it had happened.

The seven-point manifesto (I don't even remember what was on it, really), appeared after a series of exercises in which we explored our experiences, discussed them, and developed them into an alternative vision of how the world should be. In all the glory of their laminated colour A3 materiality, the action plan was implicitly unchangeable and imbued with alien authority. These had not arisen out of collaborative reflection, but were presented as the `natural_ conclusions of that process. My interest here is not in whether it was a good or a bad manifesto (I seem to remember thinking, `somewhat useful, needs editing_), but in the way it was employed. Texts (including images, film, and artefacts) can of course be used productively for education, but they ought to be used as the basis for reflection, not as the answer to learners' own conclusions. Freire warns revolutionary educators against this strategy of sloganeering (my greatest complaint with Trotskyist party pedagogy), as it is disconnected from education's true purpose. That purpose is not to convince the oppressed of a course of action, of the rightness of an ideology, or to follow a certain (variously democratic) leadership. It is to develop the oppressed's own capacity for action, their conviction that they can and should name the world, describe what is right and wrong for themselves, and seek to put an end to oppression. Educationals like CO.HE.RE.VI. are a part of that process of development.

The success of this project was actually well-demonstrated in the rejection of the manifesto. As I have said, I am not concerned with the quality of the manifesto as such, but in the critical literacy shown by the participants. Entire generations have gone through school without learning to disbelieve what people tell them. Independence of thought is a vital prerequisite for meaningful political action.

To the organisers, well done. To the volunteers and participants, thank you. To the facilitators, thank you for your efforts, but I feel that you were employing skills more suitable for facilitating meetings than educationals. The day has given me a lot of work to do, in terms of personal development and my participation in the movement, which I welcome. And I

welcome the work of the organisers as a vital part of and service to the movement which we are continually building. I hope to see further work done in this area, and offer my support and solidarity to the creation of networks that seek to identify, combat, and end gender oppression, and promote our universal liberation.

Seamus

As Seamus has already outlined the event, it is pointless to re-iterate; the day's workshops have forced me to critically re-evaluate my politics, so my thanks to the facilitators and all participants. In this article, I'll offer a brief reflection on the themes of gender as a social construction and of subversive gender performances. These themes surfaced during the discussion of the workshop entitled "Gender Invisible" in a way I found only partially satisfying.

On the one hand, some participants were hesitant to argue gender was merely socially constructed. Instead, they affirmed gender's *reality* by its *materiality*. That is, gender affects our lives, so it is `really_ real. In response, I quote Butler.

> This move to qualify and enmire the preexisting subject [i.e. people with predetermined, `natural_ gender] has appeared necessary to establish a point of agency that is not fully determined by that culture and discourse. And yet, this kind of reasoning falsely presumes (a) agency can only be established through recourse to a prediscursive `I,_ even if that `I_ is found in the midst of a discursive convergence, and (b) that to be constituted by discourse is to be determined by discourse, where determination forecloses the possibility of agency (Butler 1990: 195).

Holding onto our `natural_ gender for its security is a false promise, there is no `nature_ free of our conception of nature. Allowing for the constructed notion of gender potentially enables one to act against its oppression rather than becoming a mere `construction_ oneself (being `determined by discourse_). The recognition of this potential has led some towards an alternate position, supporting acts that subvert gender through individual performance. While I find this position preferable to a `gender-natural_ approach, it is necessary to not only subvert gender hierarchies through performance and parody, but also to change social relationships in a way so as to provide a safe and supportive environment for the performance of Queer identities. Most broadly, it is imperative to build a true society, one free of Patriarchy, Heteronormativity and essentialist conceptions of gender.

Towards these aims, CO.HE.RE.VI offered a fairly good prefigurative model. It was the most mundane of activities, asking for the names and preferred pronouns of participants, the variety of genders people identified as and the subsequent acceptance of those genders, that for me exemplified the act of *prefiguring* post-capitalist society. I got a lot out of the day, the food was great, and I offer solidarity and best wishes for all future events or projects undertaken by the organisers.

Giftzwerg

SEX WORKERS ARE WORKERS TOO!

BY BENNY RUDEBOY

UNLIKE THE MANY INDUSTRIES THAT EXIST AND HAVE SOME SORT OF PROTECTION ON THE PART OF THE RESPECTIVE WORKERS FROM THE TRADE UNIONS, THE SEX INDUSTRY/ADULT INDUSTRY IS ONE OF THE MOST UNDER-REPRESENTED IN AUSTRALIA AND AROUND THE WORLD.

The issue of sex work within the Anarchist movement and the broader anti-Capitalist movement has been seen as one of much mirth in some circles. Some say that sex-work is blatant exploitation that puts the health and well being of women at risk (remember that there are no men and Transfolk in the industry right?). Some have even argued that consenting to sex for money is not real consent and therefore tantamount to rape. These arguments come from all sides of the political spectrum. There are also the issues of legality of being a Sex-Worker and in this case I will focus on the state of Victoria because I am more familiar with it. I speak here as an advocate for the rights of Sex-Workers, an ally, and a former worker myself. I must also stress that I am not advocating or excusing the trafficking of people for sex-slavery or the abuse of minors (defined as persons under the age of 18) for the profit of others as I find the practice of this to be vile and reprehensible and a different kettle of fish all together. I

will also be touching on the other two issues surrounding Sex Work, namely drugs and street-work.

I would like to start by addressing the issue of exploitation of people in relation to this matter.

Many people can all agree that working for a monetary based wage is a form of exploitation. How does this relate to Sex-Work? For starters Sex Work IS work! It is an option for those who are able to do it. However it is not a job that just anybody can do. Like all other lines of work it requires skill, resilience, confidence and other favourable concepts such as knowledge of your own body, safety and capability. Don't builders put themselves at risk when they go to work?

There are arguments that come from certain elements of the Feminist movement that condemn Sex-Work outright for issues of exploited women and that consenting to sex for money is not real consent. Firstly, if somebody has made the informed decision to become a Sex-Worker then they should also be informed that they are always within their rights to refuse to provide services to clients for various reasons sometimes it may be the unwillingness to provide the particular service that the client is after. Like others who are not Sex-Workers, there is the universal right to withdraw consent at any stage even if it is during the provision of a sexual service. This can be done verbally and non-verbally.

In the case of Sex-Work the proverbial customer is never right and the worker is the one who is able to call the shots. On that level, there is more power to the worker. If an establishment such as a brothel or escort agency pressures or forces a worker to oblige the client regardless or to provide services to a multiple number of clients in succession when the worker is unable or unwilling then there is a major issue there and there are places to contact in relation to this matter.

This all being said I am not a fan of employment by brothels or agencies as they can at times be too demanding of their workers. The other legal option is individual advertising where you are able to set your own prices and you are under no pressure to surrender any of your income to a brothel/agency owner.

My issue with some of the critics of consensual Sex-Work is that they fail to acknowledge

the fact that there are males and Transfolk who work in the industry. For some Transfolk, Sex-Work is one of the few employment options due to discriminatory nature of many employers in other areas of work. These critics include persons such as Janice Raymond (*The Transsexual Empire: the making of the she-male*) and Sheila Jeffreys (*The Industrial Vagina: The political economy of the sex trade*). Both of these individual are well known for spewing Transphobic rhetoric and blurring the lines of sex-slavery with Sex-Workers who have made a choice to work in the industry. Raymond writes

> All transsexuals rape women's bodies by reducing the real female form to an artifact, appropriating this body for themselves ... Transsexuals merely cut off the most obvious means of invading women, so that they seem non-invasive (Raymond 1994: 104)

Funnily enough it comes as no surprise that Raymond was a member of the Sisters of Mercy (the Catholic women˘s˘ order not the 1980s band). I must remind people that I am not making examples of these two individuals because of their gender, I am merely showing views of Transfolk that come from what I always understood to be a liberationist movement. Unfortunately those views of Transfolk (and gender) pushed by Raymond and Jeffreys have a lot in common with views from the conservative wowser religious wing-nut camps.

There is the stereotype pushed by opponents of Sex Workers that a majority of Sex Workers are involved in the industry merely to sustain an addiction be it amphetamines or heroin or others. Taking into mind that some Sex Workers are users of illicit drugs however to make unsubstantiated claims that this pertains to the majority of Sex Workers is not only unfair but it is also an insult to others who choose to enter the industry. Even if a Sex Worker has a substance issue, I would say that its more of an indictment on our drug laws. If drugs were decriminalized to factor in personal use then the prices would drop and it could be regulated properly without the added social stigma. This would require safe injecting rooms with on call medical staff and needle disposal and exchange programs that run on a 24-hour basis. Just saying.

One of many other issues surrounding Sex Work is that of street-work as an option for Sex Workers. I must remind readers that street-work is illegal in Victoria ¯ most likely because it is cash in hand and not taxable and it is public solicitation ¯ and there is the risk of being harassed, moved-on or being arrested and charged with solicitation. So why do people engage in street-work? Personally my answers are limited only from my lack of experience of street-work however there is the added benefit of not having to pay a parlour/agency part of your hard earned cash. There are other risks that can come with street-work such as assault from clients. This can be avoided by being mindful of the situation. It is illegal to arm yourself against attack in the conventional sense but it may help to keep a mini deodorant can handy to be used as spray or even a ball point pen. Not only is the pen great fro writing down details to contribute to an Ugly Mug* report but they make the perfect defensive weapon (hint: poke at the soft parts of the attacker˘s body). There is always the support provided by RhED in St Kilda who are very understanding of street based Sex Workers.

For those who are considering entering the industry I must stress the issues of legality at least when it comes to working in Victoria. Firstly for your reading pleasure the definitions section of the Prostitution Control Act 1994 (VIC) is quite specific when it defines `sexual services_ and in a way makes me wish I was a fly on the wall at State Parliament when they reviewed the legislation before passing it. . For the sake of concision I will not reprint them here, but if you˘re interested the weblink is www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/vic/consol_act/pca1994295. The other pieces of relevant legislation include the Prostitution Control Regulations 1995 and Health [Infectious Diseases] Regulations 2001. Helpful organizations in Victoria include RhED (Resourcing Health & Education in the Sex Industry) who can be found online at www.sexworker.org.au and on location at 10 Inkerman Street, St Kilda for the record they are a service that is a part of the Inner South Community Health Service (ISCHS). The more activist based group for

Sex-Workers in Victoria is VIXEN (Victorian Sex Industry Network) who can be found online at www.myspace.com/vixencollective. For those who are not based in Victoria it is best to go to the webpage of the Scarlet Alliance who have information on the laws and other services relating to Sex-Work. Their site is www.scarletalliance.org.au.

There have been some improvements into how the state of Victoria manages and interacts with the industry and those that work in it however Sex-Workers still remain one of the most stigmatized and under-represented workers world wide. They need the support, solidarity and respect from the broader workers˘ movement. It is only then that there will be some real change in how society views Sex-Workers.

My body, my choice!

WHORE POWER!

Send comments to:
bash_back_86@riseup.net

* The ˙Ugly Mugs˘ Program aims to alert sex workers to dangerous individuals and situations in order to prevent further violence and harassment, as well as to provide a non-judgmental and supportive reporting system for sex workers.

The ˙Ugly Mugs˘ Program provides an avenue through which sex workers can report people (Mugs) who commit offences against them. Offences may include sexual assault, theft, physical assault or any other form of harassment or violence. (http://www.sexworker.org.au/safetyinfo/article_detail.asp?id=48)

TRANSFORMING A CULTURE OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

BY REBECCA

TRIGGER WARNING: THIS ARTICLE CONTAINS INFORMATION ABOUT RAPE AND SEXUAL ASSAULT WHICH MAY BE DISTRESSING TO SURVIVORS OF SUCH VIOLENCE, OR TO ANYONE WHO HAS THE CAPACITY FOR COMPASSION.

People often tell me women ‘have it all’. Women have the right to work, the right to vote. We even have a female Prime Minister. What more could you want? A niggling doubt remains at the back of my mind, though. Can we really say that women in Australia hold an equal place in society with men when one in seven girls and young women aged 12 to 20 will experience rape or sexual assault?

Growing up as a young woman in this society, you learn to be afraid of sexual assault and rape from an early age. People tell you: don’t wear revealing clothes, don’t go out at night, don’t drink alcohol. But you begin to wonder, why are rape and sexual assault such a danger to women? Why should one group in our society be so disproportionately victimised by another? And the answer is simple, sexism.

Rape and sexual assault are not inevitable. They rely on a society that allows women to be viewed as lesser than men. Rape is not something that ‘just happens’, it is a conscious choice on the part of the rapist to dehumanise another person. We, as a society, have created ideas about sexuality, power, masculinity and femininity that

allow people who rape or sexually assault women to justify their actions and believe that they are ‘normal’ and ‘allowed’ – but we can also change these cultural norms.

Key to this is change in the way we view male and female sexualities. We need a new masculinity – that isn’t about sexual dominance or sex as a method of gaining social status. We need a new femininity – one which allows women to be sexual beings who can assert consent or lack of consent to sexual acts without fear of being labelled ‘sluts’ or ‘teases’.

This is not an issue that can be ignored or overlooked. At least one in three Australian women at some stage experiences violence at the hands of a man. Violence outstrips obesity, smoking, drink-driving and breast cancer as the leading contributor to death, disability and illness for women in the prime of life. A National Crime Prevention study reports that one in three young women know someone who has experienced rape or sexual assault. In the same study, 14 per cent of young men agreed with the statement, ‘It’s okay for a boy to make a girl have sex with him if she has flirted with him or led him on.’

Two levels of change are required to decrease the levels of sexual violence we see in Australian communities: cultural change and legal change. As it currently stands, the conviction rates for sexual assault and rape when compared to other crimes are infintesimal. According to the Centre Against Sexual Assault, between 70% and 85% of sexual assaults are never reported to the authorities. However, even once reported only approximately one in 10 reported incidents results in a guilty finding, with Victorian police choosing not to proceed with prosecution in 60 percent of cases in a study reported rapes in 2000-2003. Whether the law should have deterrant or punitative function, in both regards it fails survivors of sexual violence.

British Solicitor General Vera Baird puts it best when she states: ‘there will never be proper female equality and appropriate dignity afforded to one-half of the population if it’s possible to rape somebody and get away with it.’

I’ll finish off with another quote, from the wonderful Joss Whedon of Buffy The Vampire Slayer and Firefly fame that suggests what we should be aiming for:

`Equality is not a concept. It˘s not something we should be striving for. It˘s a necessity. Equality is like gravity. We need it to stand on this earth as men and women. And the misogyny that is in every culture is not a true part of the human condition. It is life out of balance, and that imbalance is sucking something out of the soul of every man and woman who is confronted with it. _

DEAR DIEGO

6 October 2010

Mr. Diego Velasco-von Pilgrimm
Consul-General of Chile
13th Floor, 390 St Kilda Road
MELBOURNE VIC 3004

Dear Diego,

When we first met, I told you that I hoped we would not meet again under unhappy circumstances, because you seemed like a nice person (if slightly racist: you should have seen the look on your face when you learned we were led by an Indigenous woman!). I wasn't lying. In fact, I was reminded of a friend I had in university. She was a member of the Conservative society. One day we discussed our political differences, and why they didn't seem to get in the way of our friendship. We compared it to all civil wars, which by their nature draw the lines of battle where amity might otherwise exist. And surely, if we are humanists, every war is a civil war. I tell you this not out of a silly sense of romanticism (or, at least, not purely), but so that you will not take personally the plan I am currently executing.

Two weeks ago, you received me and my friends (with great courtesy, I must add) to hear our concerns about the treatment of the Mapuche people, about the ongoing expropriation of their land, about the militarised policing of their communities, and about the mass imprisonment of their leaders as alleged terrorists. You assured us (again, with the courtesy I so admired, and which I pray is an integral part of your character rather than merely a habit of your profession) that, in your capacity as Consul-General, you would respond to our concerns within the week. Imagine my

shock then when we received no word from your office for two weeks. It made me think you didn't like us, dearest Diego, and this nearly broke my heart.

But on reflection I realised that the spark of our friendship was a true one, a genuine human connection in the midst of our conflict! It was not you, oh noblest of comrades, who spurned our diplomatic overtures, but the government you represent. I understand that when we devote ourselves to a cause, sometimes we must carry out our responsibilities with reservations, but carry them out none the less. I am sure it pained you to ignore us, to attempt to downplay acts of genocide. And so it pains me in what I must do now. Just as it was not you who spurned us, Diego, but your Government which spurns the Mapuche and those who support them, it is not I who will now harass and annoy you, but my movement which will harass and annoy your government. You and I, gentle Diego, are merely history's unfortunate pawns.

And so it is not I, but history that will distribute your cell phone number over Melbourne (0430300351). It is not I, but history that will ignore your preference for text messages over voicemail. It is not I, but history that will instruct everyone possible to leave long, rambling voice messages asking you what's going on with the Mapuche political prisoners. It is not I, but history that will give your phone number to drunks after the grand final, telling them it's a phone sex line. It pains me to do this, Diego, but just as you have your role to fulfill in this world, I have mine. We cannot shirk our duties, I'm sure you agree. I do not begrudge you your ideals, and I would never hope to force you to think as I do. But the ideals you and your government champion seem to exclude millions of my brothers and sisters from all hope to live in peace. We are mere pawns. Business aside, I hope you and your family are well. Try not to work too hard. Enjoy the (second!) grand final, as you seemed to show such a penchant for AFL on our last meeting. Crack open a bottle of your country's finest. And don't, whatever you do, answer the phone.

With more sincerity than you'd believe,

James

UPCOMING EVENTS ◆

Sunday, 17 October, 7pm
Film Screening - *'Surplus: Terrorised Into Being Consumers'*
Loophole Community Centre, 670 High St, Thornbury

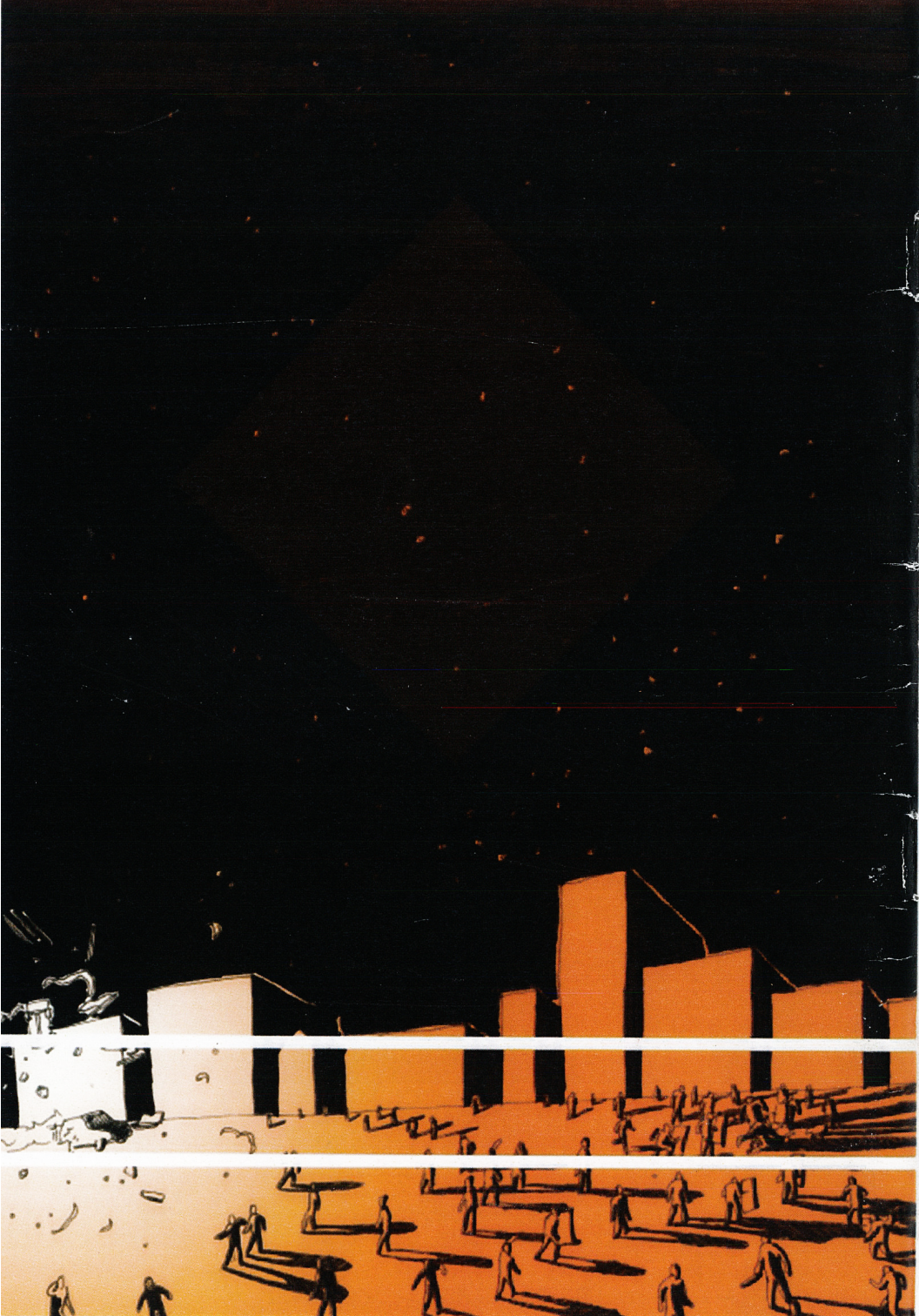
Friday, 22 October, 6.30pm
Film Screening- *'The Plunder'*; A film on the Mapuche struggle for autonomy & self-determination.
LASNET Space, Basement, Trades Hall

Saturday, 23 October, 2pm
Melbourne Black editors˘ collective meeting.
LASNET Space

Saturday, 23 October, 6.30pm
Film Screening- a night of docos on the theme of the recent anti-squatting laws in the Netherlands.
Melbourne Anarchist Resource Centre (MARC), 62 St. Georges Rd, Northcote.

Friday, 29 October, 5.30pm
Rally- *National Day of Action Against the NT Intervention*
State Library

Thursday, 4 November, 7pm
PBI Public Forum- *'Defending Human Rights in Colombia'*
Latrobe Uni, City Campus, 215 Franklin St

Friday, 5 November, 6.30pm
Film Screening- Femicide in Juarez, Mexico
LASNET Space

Friday-Sunday, 12-14 November
Latin American, Australian & Asia-Pacific Solidarity Gathering
Trades Hall